

Weeks named Outstanding Conservationists

Several others honored

By Heather Carlile

hcarlile@agrinews.com

ROCHESTER, Minn. — Eight couples lined up shoulder to shoulder on stage Dec. 4, staring into a dark room in Rochester's Mayo Civic Center.

They were each being honored for their conservation efforts by the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. A drum roll was called in anticipation of one couple being announced as the 2007 Outstanding Conservationist Award winners.

Members drummed their hands on tables.

Then Dennis and Jenell Week, cooperators in the Douglas Soil and Water Conservation District, received the honor.

They were given artwork by a South Dakota artist, Terry Redlin. The scene, named "Sunset Harvest," depicts a combine in a corn field while deer watch from a nearby forest.

Dennis said the honor was a totally unexpected, overwhelming experience.

Conservation practices implemented on the Weeks' farm include sediment blocks, grass waterways, no-till and reduced-till practices and approximately 2,000 tree plantings as shelter belts and to promote wildlife.

"If you take care of the soil, the soil is going to take care of you," said Dennis.

The Weeks grow corn, soybeans and alfalfa with a wheat rotation as well as a grape vineyard on their 400 acres near Evansville. They also have Angus cows and are in transition to become a



Heather Carlile/Agri News

Dennis and Jenell Week, who farm in the Douglas Soil and Water Conservation District, said they were surprised when they were honored by the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

certified organic farm by next year.

"I strongly feel it's a step toward protecting the environment down the road," said Dennis, of going organic.

Jerry Haggemiller of the Douglas Soil and Water Conservation District said the Weeks have been a proactive, cooperative family to work with.

"They've been easy to work with through the years," he said.

The couple was honored after 66 other families were recognized for local conservation awards for implementing practices such as windbreaks, rotational grazing, native grass and wildflower planting, limiting pesticide application and

delayed haying to advance wildlife.

Other finalists for the award were Larry and Laurie Panek of Pennington SWCD; David and Carole Cartwright of Chisago SWCD; the Ray and Ken Taylor families of Dakota SWCD; Jerry and LaVonne Schuelke of Lac qui Parle SWCD; Heins Riverside Farms of Blue Earth SWCD; Charles and Eileen Shimota of Rice SWCD; and Marsh Family Farm of Clearwater SWCD.

Other awards were also given out at the meeting.

The 2007 MASWCD/MPCA Community Conservationist is the Kettle River Advocates Group. The Washington SWCD received the DNR Division of Waters Apprecia-

tion Award. Mark Anderson of the St. James Plaindealer received the MASWCD Media Award.

Lynn Wichmann of Balaton Public School received the MASWCD Teacher Award. Pete Beckius, manager of the Scott Soil and Water Conservation District, received the Outstanding District Employee Award. Louise Smallidge of Washington County received the MASWCD Outstanding Supervisor Award.

The association named Rep. Collin Peterson as Legislator of the Year for his support of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Reserve Program, as well as funding for the farm bill's conservation title.